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HOEHLAKERS' CHAT

Monday, February 13, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "RURAL HOUSING PROBLEMS." As discussed by M. L. Wilson, Undersecretary of Agriculture, in the Journal of Home Economics for January, 1939.*

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Housing problems everywhere are claiming attention just now. M. L. Wilson, Undersecretary of Agriculture, discussed rural aspects of these problems in the Journal of Home Economics for January, 1939. Lest some of you may miss this publication, I'm going to turn the meeting today over to Mr. Wilson, as it were, - quoting as much as we have time for.

"Rural housing," Mr. Wilson thinks, "is one urgent problem which this country has virtually overlooked. Our farm families face a housing situation fully as grave as that of the cities,-- and so far little has been done to help them.

"It is true that the need for better rural housing is sometimes a little hard to understand. A farmhouse partly hidden by shade trees or framed by a country landscape may seem the ideal place to live. It has plenty of sunlight and fresh air. But the chances are at least even that the home which looks so pleasant from the road is uncomfortable, even unhealthy. Again, a neat house, a well-managed one, is difficult to attain when it is filled with a large family which eats, sleeps, and lives in one or two rooms, without screens to keep out the flies or glass for the windows.

"The nation's birth rate is greater in rural areas. It is safe to say that the nation's future a generation from now largely will rest with the children being raised in rural homes. If their health is poor, if they have a backward outlook on life, the country will suffer.

"These, then, are the high spots of the problem: crude buildings in ill-repair; inadequate sanitary facilities; and the resulting ill-health and broken morale. They fit awkwardly into the picture of the richest nation on earth."

A fundamental difference between urban and city housing is brought out by Mr. Wilson. Listen to this:

"Many city homes often become merely a place to sleep and eat an occasional meal. Farm homes have remained a much more vital part of their occupants' lives. For one thing, particularly among low-income groups, a farm family's life centers in its home. They eat all their meals there; they gather there in the evening; and even during the day their world usually

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is limited to the house and its immediate vicinity. Canning, baking, and washing hold many farm wives close to home. Lack of transportation, spending money, and good clothes keep the lives of others centered within the house.

"Another factor is the way in which the rural home enters the economic life of the family. Very seldom does a city worker's trade or business demand the use of his home. On the other hand, a large part of the farm work is carried on within the house. Caring for baby chicks, washing milk pails, canning, preparing vegetables for market, and other similar tasks are often performed in the kitchen or on the porch. They make the rural home an important contributor to the family's income.

"Good farm homes are needed and needed badly. Why haven't they been supplied and maintained? The basic reason is lack of money. Bad rural housing is rooted in the general problem of inadequate farm income."

The instability of tenant farmers increases rural poverty and adds to the rural housing problems, Mr. Wilson points out. Usually neither landlord nor tenant has the desire or the money to keep the farmhouse in repair. Continuing to quote Mr. Wilson:

"As a part of its rehabilitation program, one agency of the Department of Agriculture, the Farm Security Administration, has built approximately 10,000 farm homes. These houses, designed primarily for low-income farmers, have been partially experimental. Every kind of material from adobe to brick and stone has been used. Designs range from one-story, four-room units, to two-story homes with full basements.

"Most of the work has been done directly under the supervision of the Farm Security Administration, and costs have been kept to a surprisingly low level..... In addition, the Farm Security Administration has provided shelter for more than a thousand migrant farm laborer families in a chain of camps running through California and Arizona.

"Thus, the groundwork for a rural housing program has been laid. Any future rural housing program that develops can find here a base from which to start. Some of the homes, for instance, have running water and completely appointed kitchens and bathrooms; others have only a sink and drain in the kitchen and outside toilet facilities. Will the better equipped home justify the additional cost of construction? Which arrangement of the kitchens will prove to be the most practical?

"Virtually every month trained home economists are visiting these homes to aid the farm wives in preparing budgets, planning a balanced diet, and other household duties. While they work, these specialists have ample opportunity to check every feature of the house. Is it easy to heat? Is it cool in summer? Do the storage cellars some houses have serve better than the large pantries built in others? Are the rooms light and airy?

"Whatever program is developed must recognize that rural housing is more than a construction problem. A farm home, however well build, is of little value if it is located on poor land. Even the location of the farmhouse on the farm must be studied. For example, in some areas the Farm Security Administration has grouped several farmhouses together, so they make common use of wells and barns and the best home sites... The need for better rural housing exists, the groundwork has been started, but the real beginning has not yet been made."

That concludes Mr. Wilson's article in the Journal of Home Economics.

